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SECOND CLASS

Nation's
Restaurant News
The Weekly Newspaper of the Food-Service Industry

Vol. 23, No. 23

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June 5, 1989

Politics dominates NRA show

By Peter Romeo
CHICAGO — As the minimum-wage issue was building to a head in Washington, food-service leaders were mobilizing at the industry's annual convention here to erect defenses against a looming new round of burdensome legislation.

During the 70th annual NRA

Wage bill tops list of legislative woes

Restaurant & Hotel/Motel show, National Restaurant Association officials warned that the battle against some of the most onerous measures — including packaging bans, container taxes, and mandated

health benefits — had already been lost in some regions.

"The legislation we fear on the federal level is already being enacted on the state level," said Richard Marriott, the lodging scion who chairs the

NRA's State Relations Committee.

Association executives said they anticipated a firefight with politicians over such matters as where restaurants can put
(See **NRA SHOW**, page 107)

SHOW REPORT
Industry descends
on Chicago
Full coverage
begins on
page F9



Melman with wife, Martha, at awards dinner.

Melman wins IFMA Gold Plate

By Jack Hayes
CHICAGO — Richard Melman, a local star who slam dunks dining concepts as if he were the Michael Jordan of the restaurant industry, thrilled his hometown crowd by winning the Foodservice Operator of the Year title at the 35th annual Gold & Silver Plate Awards, sponsored by the International Food-service Manufacturers Association here.

The president of Chicago-based Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises, which owns or operates nearly 30 restaurant establishments — most of them in the metropolitan Chicago market — Melman was selected to receive the coveted Gold Plate Award. He was chosen from a group of winners representing the industry's nine major food-service segments.

Among those stars were Nor-

man Brinker, who pioneered the growth of Steak & Ale and Bennigan's and is now chairman and chief executive of the 172-unit Dallas-based Chili's Inc., and Frederick DeLuca, president and co-founder of the 2,000-plus-unit fast-service Subway chain, based in Milford, Conn.

"I'm really inspired now," a choked-up Melman told a crowd of
(See **MELMAN**, page 107)

Operators fight midweek blues with promos

By Jack Hayes
CHICAGO — Like fishermen obsessed with bringing home their limit on the days when nothing wants to bite, operators are throwing special menus, provocative discounts, and other tempting baits to midweek patrons in a revived effort to stir up stagnant Tuesday and Wednesday night traffic.

Some restaurateurs are even jumping into the water with services like "white glove" home delivery in order to capture couch potato midweek clientele who are not dining out, according to a poll of operators shopping the 70th NRA Restaurant, Hotel-Motel Show here.

"If they don't come to you, you have to go to them," said San Francisco restaurateur Faz Poursohi, who is home-delivering midweek dinners from a string of upscale operations, including Cafe Latte, Circolo, Santa Fe, and Faz.

In virtually every dining segment from tablecloth to drive-thru — particularly as the coupon wars intensify from coast to coast — operators like Poursohi claim that customers are catchable during the stubborn midweek, but it takes hard marketing.

"My father was a Burger King franchisee. I know promotions work," said Michael Smith,
(See **BATTLING**, page 4)



NRA Show attendees shop for new ideas on exhibit floor.

Chefs check out show's offerings

By Carolyn Walkup
CHICAGO — Amidst the crush of humanity attending the huge National Restaurant Association trade show and tasting the free food and drink samples, some chefs searched to find equipment, food products, and ideas relevant to their fine-dining restaurants.

Several chefs attending for the first time expressed surprise at the lack of fresh products and the overabundance of convenience or prepared foods. The exhibits were "more focused on owners than chefs," said Jeffrey Baldwin, chef-owner of Meritage in Warren, Mich. Pascal Oudin of The Colonnade Hotel in Coral Gables, Fla., said he had
(See **CHEFS**, page 107)

Notes on Reagan: The details count

By Charles Bernstein
and Peter Romeo

CHICAGO — While attendees were buzzing about Ronald Reagan's keynote address at the National Restaurant Association show here, the event's planners were amusedly gossiping about the peculiar demands they met to get the former president on stage.

In addition to a fee pegged by NRA sources at
(See **REAGAN**, page 107)

CHARLES BERNSTEIN: STRONGER EFFORT ESSENTIAL TO AID HUNGRY — PAGE F3

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June 5, 1989

Tavern on the Green begs: 'Please help or we will die'

NEW YORK — With striking employees scaring away business, the landmark Tavern on the Green here is flatly begging patrons to prevent its demise by crossing the picket line.

"Please help us or we will die," blares the headline of an advertisement placed in The New York Times by Tavern's flamboyant owner, Warner LeRoy. "Please support us. Please come to Tavern on the Green. . . . If you do not come, we will die."

Staffers struck Tavern after it refused to grant a 40-percent wage hike. LeRoy countered with an offer to boost pay by 21.4 percent and implement a new health plan. The restaurant has filled jobs with non-union workers.

Melman discloses plan for country-Western place

CHICAGO — Richard Melman, the restaurateur who delivered salad bars and tapas to the Windy City, will soon be serving up country-Western crabs and barbecue at Bub's, a 600-seat concept that will open here in an area called the Weed Street district.

Melman promised "some surprises" at Bub's when it opens in August. He hinted that one out-of-the-ordinary aspect may be an adjacent concept — Shine & Dine — featuring hybrid neighborhood cuisine and car washes.

In October, Melman's group, Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises, plans to open an Italian concept near Shaw's Crab House.

KFC plans KFC Express for walk-up traffic

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Kentucky Fried Chicken said it would open KFC Express units for walk-up customers as part of a \$30 million plan to modernize or build 20 units here in its headquarters city.

More than \$20 million of the capital improvements will be spent on a state of the art computer system linking the front counter, kitchen, drive-thru window, and headquarters.

The ambitious remodeling and equipment upgrading plan is all part of an effort to devise new services, equipment technologies, and designs that may become standard chainwide.

In a mall here, KFC will open its first express unit in July with a limited-menu concept designed to more quickly serve pedestrians.

Citymeals-on-Wheels draws 18 top chefs to charity fest

NEW YORK — Eighteen stellar American chefs will converge here at the fifth annual Citymeals-on-Wheels Tribute to James Beard to honor their mentors and raise money for Citymeals, a program that provides meals to the homebound elderly.

More than half — including Wolfgang Puck of Spago, Jimmy Schmidt of the Rattlesnake Club, and Brendan Walsh, formerly of Arizona 206 — will be reunited with their mentors at the \$350-a-plate black-tie gala.

The benefit is expected to draw 1,000 supporters, who will be treated to samplings of the favorite dishes of some of the world's most illustrious culinary talents, said Marcia Stein, executive director of Citymeals-on-Wheels.

TW resets annual meeting, raising possibility of conflict

NEW YORK — Setting the scene for a possible proxy fight, TW Services has agreed to convene shareholders in August for its previously postponed annual meeting.

Before TW canceled the regularly scheduled meeting in April, hostile suitor Coniston Partners had said it would seek to place two representatives on TW's board. Coniston is seeking to buy TW for \$29 a share.

TW rescheduled the shareholders conference after Coniston asked a Delaware court to order that a meeting be held. On the current timetable, stockholders will be convening after the deadline set by TW for the submission of acquisition offers.

Spurned suitor sweetens bid to snatch up Dairy Mart

ENFIELD, Conn. — Dairy Mart Convenience Stores, which accepted a \$15-per-share acquisition offer from a management-led group, said spurned suitor United Acquisition Corp. has sweetened its bid to \$16 an issue.

But chairman and majority shareholder Charles Nirenberg, who led the management buyout group, reiterated that he would not sell his family's stock to any outside entity. Nirenberg and kin control 60 percent of Dairy Mart's shares outstanding.

Little is known about United, which had previously offered \$15.50 a share.

Carl's Jr. chain launches first Japanese franchise

OSAKA, Japan — The 490-unit Carl's Jr. fast-food chain has opened its first branch in Japan.

The restaurant, in the Osaka suburb of Minoo, reported near-record opening-day sales volumes, a spokesman for Anaheim, Calif.-based Carl Karcher Enterprises said.

Friendly Corp. of Osaka, operator of 100 Western-style coffee shops here, built the Carl's Jr. and plans to open at least 30 more by 1993.

Chicago Dining Authority bows out of Sieben's deal

CHICAGO — The Chicago Dining Authority has pulled out of its contract to manage Sieben's Brewery & Restaurant, one of Chicago's first brew-pubs.

Cash "to pay for the project was not made available, so we terminated our contract," said Brian Margulis, CDA's director of operations. CDA had completed a redesign and menu upgrade aimed at boosting sales.

An investment group headed by Richard Walsh owns Sieben's. He couldn't be reached for comment about Sieben's financial condition.

Red Onion finishes paying \$680,000 in bias claims

CARSON, Calif. — International Union Inc., operator of 12 Red Onion Mexican dinner houses, said it has paid a total of \$680,000 in out-of-court settlements to black, Hispanic, and Iranian men who filed claims in 1986 after being denied admission to Red Onion disco-lounges.

The plaintiffs charged that they were denied entry because of alleged racist policies.

Two men accepted \$25,000 each last month to settle the last remaining claims against the Southern California-based company.

Taco Viva trades shares for Mr. Submarine rights

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — Taco Viva Inc. said it has agreed to give restaurateur Gus Boulis 7.3 million of its shares in exchange for rights to open 50 Mr. Submarine units in Florida.

Taco Viva, which operates a chain of fast-food Mexican restaurants, also said it would reduce its debt by about \$2.5 million by selling eight restaurant locations and leasing back seven.

As a result of its sale-leaseback and other agreements with Boulis, Taco Viva expects to receive about \$600,000 in working capital, it said.

Discharged Sportscene exec threatens takeover attempt

MONTREAL — The ousted operations director of Sportscene Restaurants, an operator here of eight Le Cage Aux Sports casual-dining places, said he and a group of newfound partners are planning to seek control of the chain.

Sportscene confirmed in a prepared statement that it had been approached by a former staffer who expressed interest in mounting a takeover, but said it attached "little credibility to the initiative."

Orlando Garrido, who said he was ordered by Sportscene to resign as its operations director, reported that his group would further study its prey before attempting to buy all or a major share of Sportscene's outstanding stock.

FINANCIAL NEWS

Pepsico's customer counts soar at Taco Bell, Pizza Hut

By Rajan Chaudhry
PURCHASE, N.Y. — While other top restaurant companies have struggled in vain to boost customer counts in recent months, Pepsico has lifted real same-store growth by double digits in two of its three concepts.

In the last quarter, customer counts increased an average of 22 percent at 3,000-unit Taco Bell, 13 percent at 6,700-unit Pizza Hut, and 1 percent at 7,800-unit Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Other large chains experienced tiny gains, flat or down sales for the quarter. McDonald's, for example, saw a 2-percent decline, Wendy's counts were flat despite a 6-percent coupon rate, and Roy Rogers counts fell 3 percent, said analyst Caroline Levy, who tracks Pepsico's restaurant operations for Shearson Lehman Hutton.

Real same-store growth — or customer count growth — is the single most important factor in determining restaurant stock performance, noted Levy.

Pepsico, with a total of 17,400 units and domestic sales of about \$7.6 billion, has a 13-percent share of the U.S. fast-food market. McDonald's, on the other hand has fewer stores — about 10,000 — but larger domestic sales — \$11.4 billion, giving it a 19-percent share of the fast food market.

Each of Pepsico's three concepts is the leader in its segment. KFC commands a 46-percent share of the domestic fast-food chicken market; Pizza Hut has more than 20 percent of the domestic quick-service pizza market; and Taco Bell holds a 57-percent share of the U.S. Mexican-fast-food market.

"They're also not competing head-on with McDonald's," said Levy, "which I think was so much the problem with Pillsbury."

At Pizza Hut, new product introductions, aggressive marketing, rapid unit expansion, and a new eye toward delivery are driving customer-count gains.

Although the pizza chain

has added only two new products in the past two years, both have been winners.

The first, "Pairs," introduced in 1987 to counter competition from Little Caesar's signature "Two for the price of one" strategy, offers a pair of pizzas for the price of 1½.

Despite its lower margin, "Pairs" boosts sales volumes and overall unit profitability.

"In fact," noted Levy, "because 70 percent of Pairs volume is done in takeout business, it helps margins almost as much as it hinders them because takeout business has far better margins than eat-in and deliver."

In June 1988, Pizza Hut introduced a medium crust pizza — the Hand-Tossed — to fill the niche between its thin-crust and signature pan-style products.

The product now represents 15 percent to 20 percent of sales, and it stays hotter and crisper than Pizza Hut's other products, making it ideal for delivery.

Pizza Hut has expanded its (See PEPSICO, page 106)

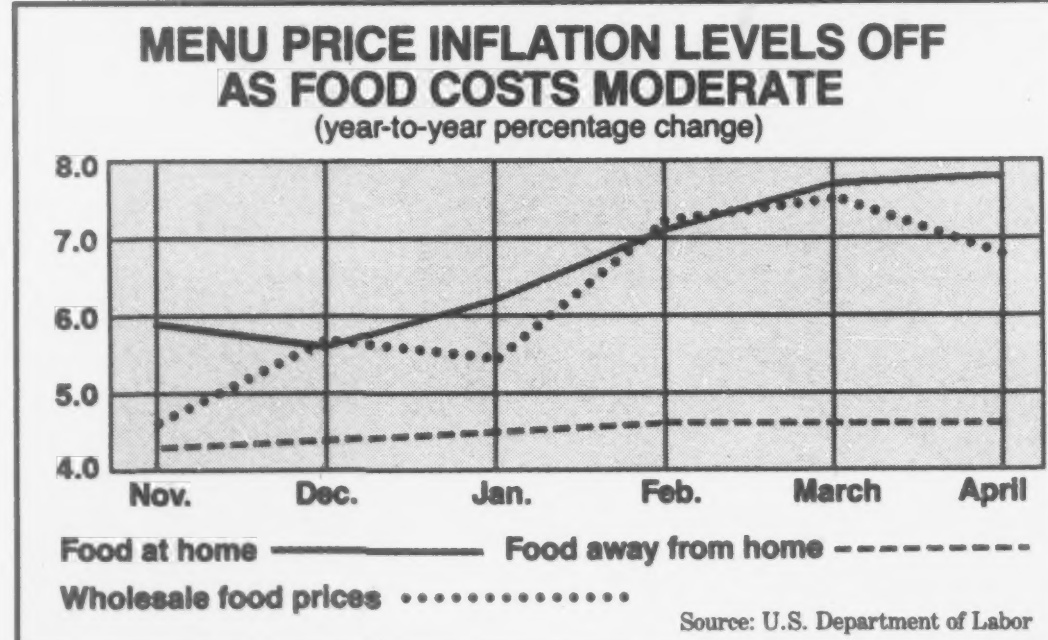
Menu price inflation flat in April

WASHINGTON — Instead of inflating checks at a faster pace to offset a traffic slowdown, restaurateurs held menu price hikes during April to the rate clocked in the prior two months, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

The department's Consumer Price Index for "food away from home" rose in April at a year-to-year gait of 4.6 percent, matching the pace of February and March. Grocery prices increased during the most recent month by 7.8 percent, compared with rates of 7.1 percent for February and 7.7 percent for March.

The overall Consumer Price Index jumped in April by .7 percent, marking the biggest increase in two years. However, most of that spike came from a record leap in gasoline prices.

While inflation of retail-food



prices stabilized in April, the rate for wholesale foods moderated to 6.8 percent from the 7.5-percent clip registered in March, according to the Labor Department.

During the most recent month, sales growth at the nation's eating-and-drinking

places slowed to 5.6 percent after hitting a velocity of 8.6 percent in unadjusted terms during March. Restaurateurs often attempt to maintain sales in the face of slackening customer traffic by hiking prices to boost the amount each patron spends.

FOOD PRICE OUTLOOK

Poor winter wheat crop to up prices

By now it isn't news that this year's winter wheat crop is in serious trouble. The harvest has started, but you should be prepared for higher prices in foods as far ranging as poultry and beef as well as in bread, cake, and cereals.

Lack of sufficient rain has resulted in many Midwestern farmers discing under their winter wheat. High winds at the end of April in the major Kansas growing area further damaged the crop there. U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates place potential national production at 8 percent below forecasts, but some agricultural economists aren't as optimistic.

Winter wheat amounts to as much as 75 percent of this country's total wheat supplies. It's not only used in bakery products and breakfast cereals, but it's also a main element in feed for poultry, egg, and meat production. All of

these will be affected by the higher wheat prices expected to be posted this summer.

In addition, government supplies of wheat are dwindling. The Soviet Union has been buying subsidized wheat from the United States, because their wheat crop was below normal last year. So far this year, they have announced intentions to purchase 1.5 million metric tons of wheat, and may buy double that before the year is over. China, too, has been buying wheat, although there have been no major purchases so far this year.

The result of these major export sales is that the usual heavy supplies of wheat in government hands will be so depleted they will not function to hold market prices down this year.

— Patt Patterson

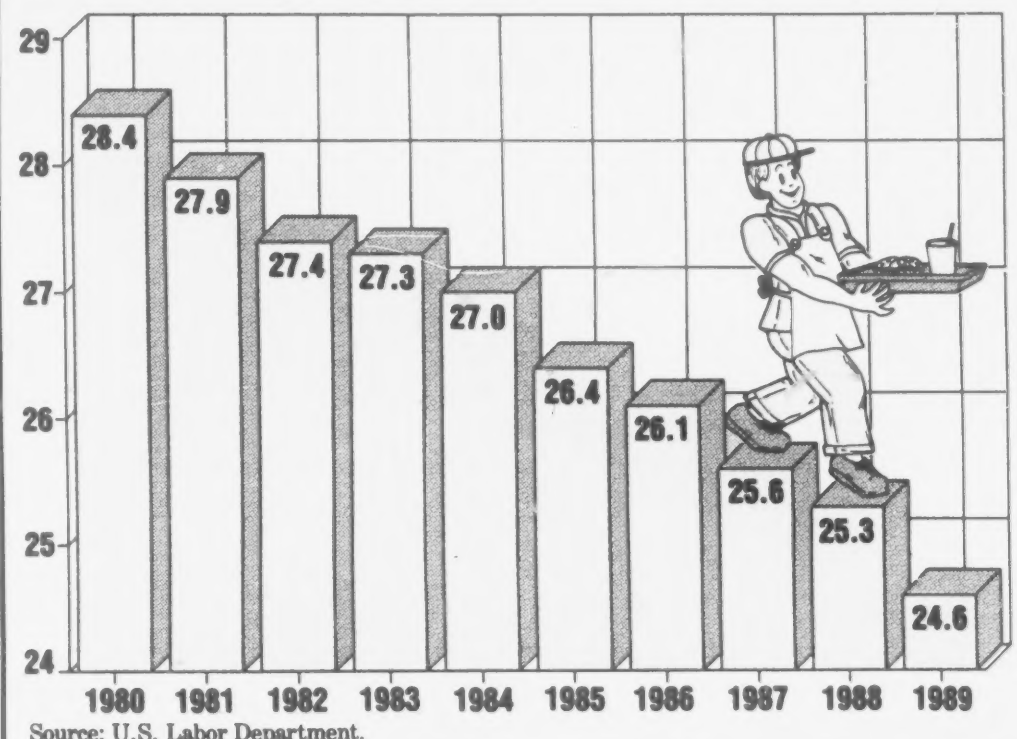
FACT FILE

A look at the statistics shaping the industry

LABOR DROUGHT IN SUMMER FORECAST

(July, millions of persons)

The number of 16-to-24-year-olds in the workforce is expected to tumble to 24.6 million in the peak-employment period of July, down 700,000 from 1988 and down 3.8 million from the all-time high tallied in 1980. Although 76.6 percent of 16-to-24-year-olds are expected to seek employment this summer — about the same as in 1980 — the population of 16-to-24-year-olds has shrunk by 5 million over the past nine years.



NRN FINANCIAL DIGEST

Circle K puts itself on the block

PHOENIX, Ariz. — Circle K Corp. has hung out the For Sale sign and said that its chairman may propose a leveraged buyout.

Circle K, the nation's second-largest convenience store operator, also said it expects to report a loss for the fourth quarter ended April 30, caused by decreased margins for merchandise and gas.

Nevertheless, the company's stock soared \$1.125 to close at \$14.25 on the day of the announcement.

Circle K's chairman, Karl Eller, holds a 7-percent stake, and its largest shareholder, Carl Lindner, holds a 38.4-percent share after the exercise of warrants and options.

Carlson to take Friday's private

DALLAS — TGI Friday's chairman Curtis L. Carlson plans to take the restaurant company private for \$51.7 million.

Carlson controls the Minneapolis-based Carlson Cos. whose unit, the Carlson Hospitality Group Inc., already holds about 80 percent of Friday's 17.8 million common shares outstanding.

Friday's operates and franchises more than 140 casual-theme T.G.I. Friday's restaurants and operates 13 Dalts.

Carlson said it plans to offer minority holders \$14.50 a share for their holdings.

In New York Stock Exchange composite trading the day after the announcement, Friday's shares leapt \$1.62 to \$14.88.

ConAgra agrees to buy Holly Farms

OMAHA, Neb. — With a sweetened stock-swap bid valued at about \$1.38 billion, ConAgra Inc. has agreed to acquire Holly Farms Corp.

If completed, the transaction would end a battle that began more than seven months ago between ConAgra and Tyson Foods Inc. for control of Holly, and would unseat Tyson as the nation's largest chicken processor.

Tyson has asked a Delaware chancery court judge to enjoin the agreement and to force Holly to redeem its poison-pill anti-takeover measure. And Tyson still could raise its bid before Holly's July shareholders meeting.

Thusfar, Springdale, Ark.-based Tyson has refused to raise its tender offer of \$1.15 billion, which Holly has twice rejected.

ConAgra came up from its previous bid of \$1.12 billion.

Rax loses \$1.9M in third quarter

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Rax Restaurants Inc., operator of the 524-unit Rax fast-food chain, reported a loss of \$1.9 million on revenues of \$26.8 million for the third quarter ended April 24.

Those figures compare with a net income of \$546,000 on an intake of \$29.7 million for the same period of fiscal 1988.

The 9.9-percent decline in revenues reflects Rax's difficulties in recovering traffic that slipped away last summer when a signature food bar suddenly lost its drawing power. The chain has since shifted its marketing focus back to sandwiches.

FOCUS | OPINION

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Stronger effort essential to aid hungry

Feeding the hungry and the homeless is a worthy objective. In fact, it should be an obligation for the "haves" of society to help the "have-nots."

Certainly, more restaurateurs and restaurants fall into the have class, despite today's difficult atmosphere in which government regulation, bitter competition, and customer resistance to pricy places are making some restaurateurs feel sorry for themselves.

Editor's Corner

Charles Bernstein



month featured the fine work of the Washington, D.C.-based Share Our Strength group in its second annual Taste of the Nation event. Some 700 restaurants joined in festivities to raise money that goes to feed the homeless.

Although the twin goals of having 1,000 restaurants in 60 cities participating and a \$1 million target were not realized, the \$750,000 raised in 48 cities far exceeded the \$250,000 garnered in 26 cities a year ago.

Denver, Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Atlanta, Chicago, New York, and other cities put forth major efforts.

The events ranged from 44 restaurants providing their best offerings to 650 people who paid \$35 each at Houston's Four Seasons Hotel to 23 restaurants serving their specialties to 250 people who paid \$75 each at Beverly Hills' Rodeo Collection Mall. Big-name Los Angeles restaurants such as L'Ermitage, Citrus, and Trumps helped lure the crowds.

We especially applaud Atlanta's Pano Karatassos, who headed the SOS national restaurant program, and Detroit's Jimmy Schmidt, who appeared on the television Today Show nationally to encourage people to attend the food fund-raising events and emphasized a toll-free information hot line for viewers to call.

Bon Appetit magazine paid the rental for the New York City event, which drew 1,000 people to a large ballroom at 295 Lafayette St. Master Card donated 25 cents to the cause each time a customer in any city used the card at a participating restaurant for two weeks prior to the events.

"What interests people about Taste of the Nation is that this is one charity in which all the funds go to the agencies that need the help," SOS founder and executive director Bill Shore aptly declared.

For example, the proceeds from the Chicago event went di-

rectly to the Greater Chicago Food Depository, the Eastern Illinois Food Bank, and international relief agencies.

All the restaurants and individuals who aided this drive deserve praise for recognizing a critical need to help others. Having lauded everyone connected with the project, we say it is a promising start but not nearly enough.

There are 650,000 restaurants and food-service units of all types in the United States. We would estimate that perhaps half of these potentially could participate in the tastings served up annually.

The help of 700, including some of the most prestigious restaurants, is encouraging. But it is also paltry for an industry that employs 8 million persons and is such a huge factor in the nation's economy.

Undeniably, the industry has an obligation to give back something to the community and to the have-nots. We would expect to see at least 2,000 restaurants participating in next spring's drive and more than 100 cities of all sizes hosting events. This is not too much to ask in an affluent society.

Nor should helping the hungry and homeless just be a one-evening annual affair. It should be a steadily continuing effort.

Fortunately, public-spirited citizens such as Gael Greene and the late James Beard have inspired constant programs to feed the hungry in New York City. More cities need to follow this example and not feel only a once-a-year obligation to help.

Caring about others and feeding the hungry do not thwart the free-enterprise system, as some have contended. Instead, this concern gives some people a chance to get back on their feet and possibly regain their self-respect.

Taste of the Nation should in effect be a daily or weekly event in each city. It should be carried through in the same enterprising spirit that motivates Victor Tiffany of the Banana Bay Grille, Kissimmee, Fla. "In Orlando, as in many cities, we have a large number of homeless people who go to sleep hungry every night," he says. "Each week we save leftovers and cook up two huge and hot stews that we bring to help feed the homeless."

A few other restaurants in the Orlando area also participate year-round. Orlando food-critic Scott Joseph and other food-service professionals are helping, too.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if all the restaurants in the Taste of the Nation event continued their concern and goodwill afterward and brought leftovers to their local homeless centers every week?" Tiffany asks.

It would be even more wonderful if a lot more restaurants participated in Taste of the Nation and tried to help the hungry all year. A little altruism — at virtually no financial cost to a restaurant — can only promote goodwill.

LETTERS

Dept. store operations can be unique concepts

Editor, NRN:

As general manager of Canada's largest department store restaurant group, The Bay and Simpsons, I was very much interested in your Editor's Corner, "Department stores: Time to wake up."

Through the support of senior management, we have been able to create exciting restaurant concepts supplemented by our own sales promotion programs.

In October we completed construction of The Arcadian Court restaurant in our downtown Simpsons Toronto store, giving us the entire eighth floor devoted completely to three unique and different concepts.

The Arcadian court is a full-service, white-linen restaurant in the traditional fashion. The Bay Street Bar and Grille is an open-kitchen concept targeted toward the financial center clientele, and the City View Cafe is a self-serve, 400-seat restaurant.

We operate more than 40 self-service cafeterias in The Bay department store chain and we have put materials to use to market and merchandise these units.

We are proud of our restaurants and the unique role we play in the entire retail scheme of the organization.

Thank you for highlighting department store food services.

— D.A. Fairweather
corporate general manager
HBC Food Services
Toronto

Dishonest bartenders are as good as beans

Editor, NRN:

As this is my first letter to you in many years of enjoying Nation's Restaurant News, I want to thank you for maintaining such a well-rounded, industry-conscious publication. You maintain the pulse of a dynamically changing industry while paying due respect to such fundamentals as training, customer service, sound business practices, and perceived value, which have been the basis for real growth.

Among the contributing writers I hold in great esteem is Herman E. Zaccarelli. His article on dishonest bartenders moves me to share the following anecdote.

A leading restaurateur observed a pile of whole coffee beans adjacent to the cash register that the devious mixologist

had been using to keep track of his "skimming proceeds." The owner asked the bartender why the beans were on the back bar. The employee replied that he liked to eat them.

The owner then told the culprit to eat the unground beans. The thief grimaced and swallowed them. The operator then terminated the employee on the spot.

— Daniel A. Groat
Sunnyvale, Calif.

Greenaway leaves legacy of admiration, respect

Editor, NRN:

It is with a great deal of sadness that I read in Nation's Restaurant News of the death of Donald Greenaway. My admiration for this man spans a period of about 30 years. He was a kind, wise, and knowledgeable executive.

Within a few weeks I will be observing my 60th year with Edward Don and Co. of Chicago and Florida. In my lifetime, few men came on the scene like Greenaway.

— Ira Lieb
sales manager
Edward Don and Co.
Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

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